DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 035 646 TE 001 692

AUTHOR	Lierheimer, Alvin P.
TITLE	Give Up the Ship: A New Basis for State Certification.
INSTITUTION	New York State English Council, Oswego.
PUB DATE	Oct 69
NOTE	7p.
JOURNAL CIT	The English Record; v20 n1 p64-70 Oct 1969
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.45
DESCRIPTORS	*School Responsibility, School Role, State Departments of Education, *State Licensing Boards, State School District Relationship, Teacher Certificates, *Teacher Certification, Teacher Education, *Teacher Evaluation, Teacher Improvement, Teacher Qualifications, Teacher Rating, *Teachers Colleges

ABSTRACT

The present state certification system for teachers evaluates the teacher's preservice education rather than his in-service ability to bring about the learning of children. Three organizations--teachers' colleges, local schools, and state education offices--must work together to extensively revise the certification procedure. Teachers' colleges, in addition to providing the best general and specialized education possible, need to develop techniques for measuring both the teacher's knowledge of subject material and his capacity for creatively working with children. Although such college certification would provide a temporary improvement, the schools themselves must ultimately decide on the licensing standards which should incorporate current educational research and encourage teachers to regularly improve their teaching. The state office would maintain a data bank of information about teaching personnel and teacher supply-and-demand for long range planning, help schools evaluate the competency of teachers to fulfill new educational functions, monitor local evaluation plans and research, and attempt to make the teaching profession more attractive. (LH)

English Record; Vol. 20, No. 1, October 1969

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

GIVE UP THE SHIP: A NEW BASIS FOR STATE CERTIFICATION

Alvin P. Lierheimer

ED035646

Americans have always been stirred by the motto, "Don't Give Up the Ship," but in taking about certification contrary advice is indicated. Give up the ship because it is sinking! Those glorious words of Captain James Lawrence in the War of 1812 didn't save his ship, the *Chesapeake*, and they're not likely to save this vessel of inadequacies.

Now it would be best not to abandon ship until at least something floating is within reach which appears to be going in the right direction. Simple abandonment of certification or just turning it over to someone else will solve nothing. Years ago certification action was taken by local superintendents. This arrangement was fraught with all the scandalous inequities one could imagine. Some of today's senior spokesmen in education who survived this era may not relish a simplistic return to those days.

But the state could exercise a teaching personnel role which would scarcely resemble certification as we know it today. In carrying out its teaching personnel function the state office would maintain a data bank of information about all teaching personnel; the office would be concerned more with making teaching attractive than it was with building restrictive walls around it; the state office would help schools set up teams to evaluate the competence of prospective teachers to fulfill new and differentiated educational functions; the state office would monitor local evaluation plans and maintain a research arm to determine improvements; the state office would use data processing techniques for record keeping and to provide critical summaries of supply and demand to assist higher institutions in their long-range planning.

EDO35646

State directors of certification get more than their share of criticism from disappointed certificate seekers, their husbands, attorneys, and legislators. The abuse is usually a result of anger and not reason. Seldom do the critics, either individually or through professional associations, offer a satisfactory alternative to the existing approach of state certification. Relatively few states are involved in serious discussions about major changes in the certification procedure, let alone about its philosophy. The state of Washington is an outstanding exception in this regard.

Alvin P. Lierheimer is the Assistant Commissioner for Higher Education, State Education Department of New York.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY New York State English Council and author
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

Resistance to change rather than resilience in certification does not jibe with the differences any observer can see coming in the schools over the next decade. Differentiated functions for staff, new technology for instruction, new or reorganized curriculums, are some of the changes that compel a re-examination of teacher certification.

What's wrong with certification as it now exists? Today certification means course-prescription by the state. Completion of the prescription is offered to the public as a guarantee against incompetence in the classroom. If that is really the purpose of certification, is the state the best agency to carry out the function? The state is far removed from the individual teacher whose incompetence is being protected against. One could well ask why the decision about competence is not by someone who *knows* the teacher.

Even today's approved program approach, which is practiced in 40 of the 50 states, tends to hold colleges to a state-determined curriculum. In this approved program approach, the state agency grants approval to the higher institution preparing teachers on the basis of an examination of its qualifications including staff, curriculum, library, etc. The state then automatically issues a teaching certificate to persons recommended by that college. No individual examination of transcript is done where this approved program approach is carried out in its best form. But even though James B. Conant was impressed with this approach, he was perceptive enough to see that in most places the college's approved program must follow exactly the courses prescribed for state certification. Such a curricular requirement does not provide the freedom which colleges must have if they are also to be held responsible for the qualifications of the teachers they prepare.

If an adequate education means not only the acquisition of information but the integration of knowledge and skills in a healthy personality, teacher preparation cannot be allowed to become a dreary regimen of required courses and prescribed attitudes. Our most sensitive and adaptable people must be attracted to the profession of teaching, and by giving them realistic knowledge to support their intuitions they must be prepared to make a creative intervention in the lives of the individuals who sit in their classrooms.

The major problem with using curriculum as a basis for certification is that it doesn't reveal how a teacher works with children. It focuses attention on the past with the assumption that completion of a uniform pattern of courses is a predictor of future performance in any classroom. College preparation can't

take into account where the certified beginning teacher is going to work. It cannot possibly prepare the beginning teacher for a specific assignment. It must be general in its approach and hope that the able teacher will make the modifications that will help her be completely at home in teaching a slum first grade even though her college major was the 19th century romantic poets. This teacher may appear to have much more success if she is assigned to a suburban sixth grade where the class size is small and the children bright and eager. Present certification practice says the same courses will suffice for both situations.

But any judgment about a teacher's failure or success ought to take into account the nature of the learner. Success might very well be determined by the kind of help provided on the job by supervisory personnel and the kind of human understanding that comes from a combination of teaching, introspection, and personal experience.

Many states issue a life certificate to a teacher who has never taught but who has completed the requisite study. It is the same certificate possessed by the experienced teacher who can handle the wide range of activities and youngsters in a normal class. It would make more sense not only to hold off certification for the novice but indeed to provide a junior level entry position where only a limited amount of training would qualify a person for classroom service. Much of the more demanding training for career teaching might take place after the first few years on the job. It makes more economic sense to postpone and make more functional the expensive advanced training for teachers who will stay in the profession rather than spend the precious college years trying to develop technical skills for teachers, half of whom drop out at the end of two years.

Many states have now gone through an era of hiking up the academic requirements so that they are more appealing to persons of a scholarly bent. Yet most observers agree that the teacher's academic scholarship alone doesn't assure successful learning on the part of youngsters. The increase in course requirements also neglects the fact that academic subjects in college are not organized for instructional purposes in the elementary and secondary schools.

No one is suggesting that *lower* subject matter requirements will make for better teachers. But one must certainly ask whether larger doses of more scholarly subject matter will yield effective teachers who are indeed sensitive respondents to children and creative agents of intellectual and character growth. Certainly if one of the purposes of education is to mold men rather than simply to produce knowledge, we must be seriously inter-

ested in preparing teachers who show a concern for the future of man. This concern is reflected in Hilda Taba's remarks about the need for emphasis on emotional content in curriculum; materials which make an impact on feelings, which generate insight into values, and which permit an analysis of human factors and relationships in events of life.

Some state officials concerned with certification shudder at the prospect of continuing the same pattern of certification by course description when they see the staffing patterns in the schools yielding to the fixed notions of the past. Schools are developing bona fide job descriptions and titles faster than the state can print new certificates. A new hierarchy of teachers serving differentiated functions will develop even faster with implementation of the Education Professions Development Act.

Delay in processing certification credentials is a problem which plagues almost every state. This delay is typically a problem of organization, management, or insufficient staffing. It is not philosophically a sound reason for changing certification procedures although it is the one most applicants offer when they get abusive.

The basic problem concerning certification is that it relates to input, what's gone into a teacher's preparation. It is not a statement about performance on the job, ability to bring about learning. It is not a statement about output.

Certification is, after all, a restrictive device. Its purpose and philosophy is to keep people *out* with certain exceptions. It represents the profession's walls that guard against invasion by the dilettante. In light of the manpower shortages which we have experienced for at least two decades and can expect to be involved in for decades to come, perhaps the state's principal effort should be on attracting people *into* teaching rather than keeping them *out*. Maybe a state agency should be concerned with job satisfactions, with more realistic pre-teaching experiences, with substitutes for the intellectual satisfactions which are missing in slum schools, with other rewards for teaching.

It will take a bold move to crack the safe of certification in which the family rhinestones have been kept for many years. The strongbox of certification is guarded not only by the state but by the profession itself. No weak assault will suffice. A bold design is called for. There are two agencies which, with some help from the state, could transform this licensing function into something more meaningful; something more realistic. The two agencies, of course, are the college and the public schools. Consider how each might participate in licensure or certification.

The college's role is still one of providing the best possible

general and specialized education that it can for teachers as well as for others. State approval of the college teacher education program should take into account a number of key items. For example, a look at the staff to determine whether or not they appear to have sound preparation and whether they are a productive staff with an appropriate teaching load. Approval considers the library and other physical resources. It examines the nature of the institutional involvement in planning programs for preparing future teachers. The approval agency asks about the performance behaviors which students of teaching are expected to master or the models to which students are exposed and the types of experiences that are provided to develop a desired performance behavior. In approving a college program one asks how individual differences among teachers are accommodated and how the feedback from graduates is gathered and used to alter the program.

Students learn best when they perceive the immediate relevance of course material to their own experiences. The college's instruction about teaching should show teachers how to suggest such relevance and artfully to instill subject matter into the students' perceptions. What teachers need in addition to a knowledge of subject matter is the capacity to intervene creatively in students' lives and to provide them with ways of understanding and contending with reality. Such capacity is first of all dependent on the teachers' sympathetic understanding of the ways in which individuals different from themselves view and feel their experiences.

How to bridge the theory-practice gap remains a puzzle for school and college to resolve. So little of what university research reveals shows up in classrooms. Does education have or need a counterpart to medicine's clinical researcher—the practitioner-professor who gathers evidence from daily patients but devotes precious time also to the research for which this evidence is the prime input.

Ultimately the agency to decide on teacher performance for licensing purposes is the school. A decision regarding adequacy could be reached by teachers and administrators working through some approved form of cooperation. Perhaps the college graduate could be issued an interim certificate good for service under a lightened load for a limited period of time and during which time teaching performance would be assessed locally. To carry out this responsibility, the public schools must be given the necessary resources. This includes a different load arrangement; it means that some teacher's function will be that of "teacher trainer" rather than simply classroom instructor of children.

Administrators and teachers will need help in learning how to evaluate teachers in situational and in behavioral terms. Neither the school nor the college will be able to avoid the clear responsibility for judging personal characteristics appropriate for teaching. Yet such judgments must not simply perpetuate the stereotypes of the past. The present teaching load leaves no time for persons who wish to reflect seriously about their own teaching, let alone about someone else's teaching, or to seek systematic means for improving their performance on the basis of known research. The sheer pressure of doling out information, attending conferences, faculty meetings, doing lunchroom duty, maintaining records, etc. makes it impossible for the school to be organized as a true center of inquiry much less a teacher preparatory institution.

For its part in the scheme of things, the state could work out the details of the licensing plan, perhaps a preliminary certificate for the intern or assistant teacher and then a subsequent level of certification. The state could provide help to local schools in developing assessment devices and plans as well as ways to use them. It could do this through its own resources and through the short-term employment of specialized talent from a variety of sources including colleges and universities, regional laboratories, research and development centers and educational industries. The state could support experimentation with the development of assessment tools that might make it possible to predict success in teaching from simulated trials. These techniques would be based on what a person can do rather than on what courses he had taken.

The state should continue to be the processor and the repository of records so that as teachers move from place to place they are assured of a central record-keeping source. Even under this law new licensing arrangement, *having* a credential would not be a guarantee of future employment any more than it is at present.

Teacher personnel records could be computerized and information gathered for periodic reports that furnish schools with lists of qualified and available personnel, and notify candidates of the need to move from one level of certification to another. Computerized processing could also yield supply and demand figures for colleges planning new programs. The necessary teacher personnel information could be available "on line" for any employing officer who wished to know about a candidate in a fashion at least as useful as some states have now for drivers' licenses. However, the state's role in regard to teachers would *not* be to make judgments but rather to maintain records of local judgments in a readily useful manner.

Until such time as performance standards for teachers are developed and tried out, certification could be granted solely on the recommendation of an approved higher institution. Transients who were not a graduate of a particular institution could apply to a state approved institution and be evaluated for a certificate. This evaluation would be based on more than an analysis of credentials. It would involve at least an interview and perhaps a real or simulated classroom test. The state could pay an equitable per capita fee to the college for the service.

College evaluation as the only means to a certificate should be only an interim step. With state financial and moral support, assessment instruments and procedures for determining the adequacy of beginning teachers should be developed and tested for large scale use. An evaluation of results should reveal if the tests really tell whether the teacher is responsible for the children's learning. Evaluation should also consider the degree to which the judgment could be generalized for use in other situations. In the developmental stages at least, the state could arrange for inservice help for administrators making judgments and help also for teachers who had responsibilities in the induction process.

Levels of competence beyond the initial minimum could be based on combinations of training and performance identified by professional groups and worked into the state's record-keeping function so that specialties could be known to inquiring employers.

No one expects an article to provide in detail all the elements of a viable plan for something as complex as professional licensure for teachers. The subject, however, has not been seriously considered in its operational detail for too many decades. Deliberate and detailed discussion is needed of workable alternatives to a hopelessly outmoded system that stands astride the schools making necesary change and improvement more difficult than it need be. If we succeed in adapting teacher preparation and certification to our best contemporary understanding of human character and need, the achievement will be a guarantee of vitality to the entire educational enterprise.